

The Dog at My Feet

Stories of the Dogs We Love

Callie Smith Grant



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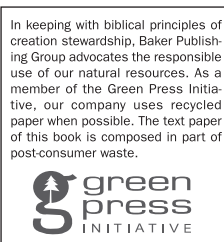
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To my editor, Vicki Crumpton,
good and patient friend
to animals and writers



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Foreword

H. Norman Wright



A dog: companion, friend, protector, playmate, and life-changer. Dogs add a dimension to our lives that otherwise would be just a vacant spot. They work for us, guard us, play with us, entertain us, love us, keep us company, and change our lives. That's one of the reasons we like to read about them.

I was delighted to be asked to read this manuscript, and then I discovered I couldn't put it down . . . and neither will you. My resolve to read one chapter at a time crumbled as I became engaged by these stories. It's a book about dogs, but it's more than that. It's a slice of life as it really is—families, difficult times, sadness, joy, losses, and additions. You'll laugh because you've experienced the delights of a dog. You'll say, "I've been there," "My dog did that," "I remember when . . ." and "I hadn't thought about that for years."

This is a book to activate memories, childhood events, family interactions, and just how much a dog can fulfill your life. You may find tears making their appearance with some of the good-byes you read. But you wouldn't miss the experience for anything.

Get ready for an enjoyable journey that may encourage you to reach out and pet your dog, and if you don't have one, to consider opening your heart and home to one.

Introduction

Callie Smith Grant



A friend of mine collected first-edition Jack London books. He was stunned that I'd become an adult without ever having read London's *The Call of the Wild*. "You like dogs," he said. "Read this," and he handed me one of his first editions. Flattered that he'd trust me with such a prize, I sat in the sun the next day and read it straight through. These many years later, one scene still remains with me; it's in the chapter "For the Love of a Man."

The story takes place in the gold rush days of the Far North. The hero, a man named Thornton, has a marvelous sled dog named Buck. One day in a gold camp full of prospectors, some macho bragging commences around the subject of the sled dogs. One thing leads to another, and Thornton finds himself reluctantly agreeing to wager a thousand dollars' worth of

gold dust that Buck can pull a thousand pounds of gear on a sled for the distance of one hundred yards.

Thornton is conflicted, of course. Buck is strong, but Thornton isn't sure if Buck is *that* strong. More important, Thornton deeply loves the dog and doesn't want the dog to hurt himself. So Thornton doesn't want to go through with the bet. But he is surrounded by gold rush men, and—macho moments being what they are—he doesn't back down.

In all the excitement before the actual pull, Thornton kneels down in front of his dog Buck:

He took his head in his two hands and rested cheek to cheek. . . . He whispered in his ear. "As you love me, Buck. As you love me," was what he whispered. Buck whined with suppressed eagerness.¹

I have always remembered that intimate moment between human and dog—the "As you love me," followed by Buck's response of anticipation. While gambling on an animal's strength would be repugnant to most of us, this scene nevertheless has always shown me the beautiful, mysterious connection between people and dogs, a kind of connection we have with no other creature.

And that wager? Of course Buck comes through and pulls that weight the full distance. Amid all the chaos of the victory, Thornton falls to his knees in front of his dog and openly weeps. Then comes another intimate moment, a both playful and meaningful moment, the kind of moment that helped bring the wolf to man thousands of years ago:

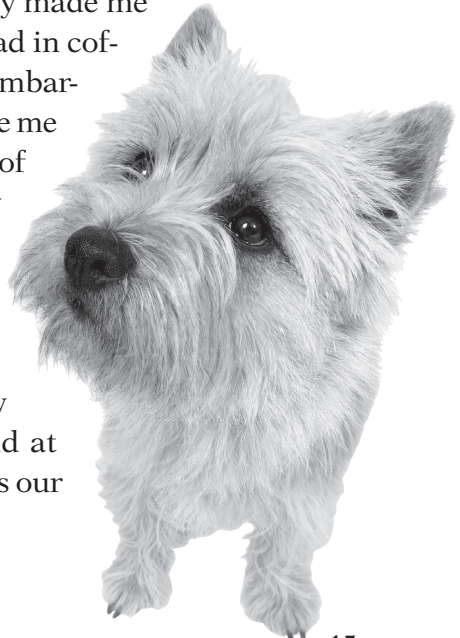
Buck seized Thornton's hand in his teeth. Thornton shook him back and forth. As though animated by a common impulse, the onlookers drew back to a respectful stance; nor were they again indiscreet enough to interrupt.²

If you have ever loved a dog and been loved back, you understand.

We've had this love affair with our dogs for thousands of years. During these years, many times our Creator has sent the right dog to the right place at the right time. This book is full of such stories—stories of relationships between humans and their best friend, the dog.

Finding and reading these stories was a pleasure. They made me remember all the dogs in my life. They made me want to adopt lots of dogs. Sometimes they made me laugh, often they made me cry, and since I tend to read in coffeehouses, it got a little embarrassing. These stories made me appreciate that fifth day of creation in a whole new light. Truly, what a creative day that was to produce this noble animal.

My hope is that these stories make you as happy as they've made me—and at least a fraction as happy as our dogs make us.



A Prince among Dogs

Melody Carlson



No one ever knew it to look at him, but somehow this scraggly little black mutt managed to live up to his name: Prince.

Now, let it be known that we did not name him Prince. If he'd been our dog right from the start, we probably would have named him something much more appropriate, like Scruffy or Scrappy or Scamp. But no, he came to us with the name and "only for a short visit."

His owner, Julie, was an exchange student from Singapore, and she'd found the poor puppy literally lying in the street gutter. She told us how he'd been wet and cold and hungry, and despite her apartment's no pets rule, she had rescued him and taken him in. But after several weeks of hiding the forbidden dog, she brought him to our house "for a short visit."



Ever consider what our dogs must think of us? I mean, here we come back from a grocery store with the most amazing haul—chicken, pork, half a cow. They must think we're the greatest hunters on earth!

Anne Tyler

“Just for a couple of weeks,” she promised me, “until I can figure something else out.”

But after we'd spent a couple of weeks doggy-sitting, our friend Julie pleaded with us to keep her doggy for good. “You have a yard and a fence,” she pointed out. “And I'll come to visit every week.”

Of course, she didn't have to push too hard since our boys (ages four and five at the time) had already fallen in love with this peppy little puppy. In fact, we were all taken by the sweet little mutt (a mix of Scotty and other terrier and who knew what else), but we weren't too crazy about the name. “Prince” sounded so formal—more like the name of a German shepherd, Great Dane, or Doberman pinscher. Not a scraggly little black mutt.

Just the same, our family adopted the dog “formerly known as Prince,” and although we all tried to come up with a name more fitting, we seemed to be stuck with Prince.

Before too long Prince revealed some of his princely character to our family. It started when our younger son Luke was sick in bed with the flu. Now, Prince didn't usually go upstairs where the boys' rooms were. He usually stuck to me like glue since I was the one who fed him. But on this particular day he disap-

peared. When I went upstairs to take Luke some juice and check his fever, there was Prince, resting quietly beside my sick boy.

At first I thought maybe Prince was ill too (could dogs get the flu?). But his tail wagged happily when he saw me, and he seemed perfectly fine. He didn't leave Luke's side until Luke began feeling better. That's when I began wondering if we should start calling our dog "Dr. Prince."

Now, if this had happened only once, we might have chalked it up to a fluke or coincidence, but the same thing happened again and again. Whenever anyone in our family was sick, Prince would be right by that person's side, almost as if it was his job to take care of them until they recovered. It was incredible to see this normally active dog put aside his romping needs to display this kind of amazing canine compassion for an ailing family member.

But perhaps the most remarkable Prince memory I have is of the time one of our cats (which Prince normally had little use for) had been hit by a car. Pepper's injured leg was bandaged, and we put him in a cardboard box with a blanket, hoping he would rest and heal with time. And sure enough, when I went to check on Pepper's condition, there was Prince, right there in the box with him. He was peacefully curled up right next to Pepper, keeping the cat warm. It was the strangest thing to see. Even our other cat hadn't gone to that much trouble for his feline friend.

Our little Prince lived for nearly sixteen years. And he was loyal and true to our family the entire time. Even in his final days, when he was in pain and nearly blind, I knew that he would lay down his little life for any of us. By then we had all come to realize that his name hadn't been a mistake at all. Without a doubt, our little mutt had been named appropriately—for he truly was a Prince among dogs.